



Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR)
% European Centre for Press and Media Freedom
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Tuesday 2nd February 2021

TO:

Prime Minister, **Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP**

CC:

The Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, **Lord Jonathan Evans of Weardale**

Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, **Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP**

Dear Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP,

The Media Freedom Rapid Response condemns the harassment directed at Nadine White and calls on MPs and Ministers to stop targeting journalists doing their job

On Friday 29th January, [Huffington Post UK journalist, Nadine White](#) was subjected to online harassment severe enough to warrant making her Twitter account private after UK Treasury & Equalities Minister [Kemi Badenoch MP tweeted a thread](#) discrediting the journalist and incorrectly accusing her of making false claims. This followed two emails sent by Ms White to the Minister's official email address requesting a statement as to why she did not contribute to a video with black cross-party MPs calling for greater uptake of the vaccine by the black community.

In her eight-tweet thread, the Minister stated that the journalist's actions sowed "[distrust by making up claims](#)" and that Huffington Post "are quite happy to [undermine our efforts to build trust](#) in the vaccine by making absurd claims." She also claimed that Ms White's request was "[creepy and bizarre](#)", before insinuating that it was an attempt to "smear" the Minister. According to Ms White and [Jess Brammar, the editor-in-chief of Huffington Post UK](#), following the publication of the thread, Nadine White received significant harassment and abuse through her Twitter account, which required her to temporarily make her account private.

Reaching out to the subject of a journalistic report is an established and standard process for journalists to ensure all parties are accurately and fairly represented. This is a

vital step in establishing trust in journalism and it is deeply concerning that this process has been presented as something that undermines said trust. This was further reinforced by the choice of Minister Kemi Badenoch MP to screenshot Nadine White's private email and tag her Twitter account in the thread. This aided in the directing of online abuse towards Nadine White. Online harassment targeted at journalists, disproportionately affecting women and journalists of colour, continues to threaten journalists, encouraging them to avoid important topics or step back from doing their job. The responsibility of politicians, most notably Ministers, to ensure their action does not contribute to these threats cannot be understated.

This was reinforced by the [NUJ General Secretary, Michelle Stanistreet](#): "Elected representatives should be working to boost standards of public discourse, not indulging in petty outbursts that deepen hostility towards journalists and journalism." The NUJ's own [safety survey](#) among its members showed an overwhelming number of respondents (98%) agree that "those in public office, including politicians, have a leadership role to play in maintaining high levels of public discourse and they should avoid dismissing journalistic work as fake news". We are deeply concerned by the lack of public accountability or engagement by the Treasury & Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch MP, the UK Government or yourself to ensure that Nadine White is able to continue her work and that this situation is not replicated in the future. Journalists and media workers require unequivocal acknowledgement from those in power that online and offline harassment should not be normalised, or endured as 'part of the job'.

The MFRR calls on the UK Government to respond to all journalistic requests in the good faith this process deserves to ensure the public is informed. We also call on all elected officials and representatives of the government to take meaningful action to ensure their actions do not enoble or encourage online harassment targeting journalists and media workers.

Kind regards,

ARTICLE 19

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Free Press Unlimited

OBC Transeuropa

This letter has been written by the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by a consortium led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Institute for Applied Informatics at the University of Leipzig (InfAI), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT). The project is co-funded by the European Commission.

 **MEDIA FREEDOM
RAPID RESPONSE**

